



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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NATIONAL AQUARIUM TO REMAIN OPEN

The National Aquarium, which had been scheduled to close February 28, will continue to operate under a cooperative agreement transferring its operation from the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to a private, nonprofit organization, the National Aquarium Society.

"Over the years, the National Aquarium has been enjoyed by millions of visitors to the Nation's Capital, and countless area residents have had their first experience with aquatic life here," said G. Ray Arnett, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. "And so we are delighted that the aquarium will remain open to the public under the sponsorship of the National Aquarium Society. This is an excellent example of cooperation between the government and the private sector to continue activities that the government must phase out because of the need to reduce Federal spending."

The aquarium, which is located in the basement of the Commerce Department building in Washington, D.C., will be entirely funded by the National Aquarium Society. The Society plans to raise money through memberships, an "Adopt-a-Fish" program, and donations from individuals and corporations. Guest Services, Inc. (GSI), a private company that provides food, lodging, and recreational services and that operates a cafeteria in the Commerce Department building, has contracted to operate the aquarium for the Society. GSI has also become the first corporate donor with a contribution of \$10,000. An admission fee of \$1 for adults and 50 cents for children will be charged beginning in the near future.

Mrs. Malcolm Baldrige, chairman of the National Aquarium Society and wife of the Secretary of Commerce, said that the Society eventually hopes to provide free admission for Washington school children and perhaps for all children on certain days, and that funds will also be used for capital improvements in the aquarium, educational projects, special displays, and establishment of a gift shop.

The future of the aquarium has been in doubt since last year, when its quarter-million-dollar budget was proposed for elimination as part of the Administration's effort to reduce Federal spending. Congress provided no funds for operation of the aquarium in the Fish and Wildlife Service budget for FY 1982.

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The aquarium was founded in 1873 at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, and was moved to Washington in 1878. It has been at its present location since 1932. Responsibility for the aquarium was transferred to the Department of the Interior in 1938, but the aquarium remained in its Commerce Department location.

Presently the aquarium exhibits over 100 species of freshwater and marine fish, ranging from fish of the Chesapeake Bay region to sharks and colorful South Pacific reef fish. It is visited by about 350,000 people annually.

A grassroots movement to save the aquarium was quickly formed after its proposed closure was announced, and, with establishment of the National Aquarium Society in January 1982, arrangements for transfer of the aquarium to a private group became feasible.

Under the cooperative agreement, the Fish and Wildlife Service and the General Services Administration have authorized the National Aquarium Society to operate and maintain the aquarium. The fish and essential equipment will remain in the aquarium for the Society's use, and must be returned to the government in good condition should the agreement be terminated by either party. The agreement also provides that the government may inspect the condition of the fish and equipment at any time.

Individuals or businesses who wish to obtain information about the National Aquarium Society should contact Mrs. Malcolm Baldrige or Mrs. Ivan Selin, Department of Commerce Building, Room B-037, Washington, D.C. 20230 (202/377-2825 or 202/342-0077).

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